UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1997/70
9 June 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1997
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 1997
Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda*

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Freshwater, including clean and safe water supply and sanitation

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1	2
I. EMERGING ISSUES IN WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT	2 - 7	2
II. REVIEW OF RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM	8 - 39	4
A. Intergovernmental policy discussions on water-related programmes and activities of the United Nations system	9 - 13	4
B. Cooperative arrangements among organizations and bodies of the United Nations system	14 - 36	5
C. Cooperative arrangements among organizations within and outside of the United Nations system	37 - 39	13
III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN COORDINATION	40 - 49	14

* E/1997/100.

97-15406 (E) 260697 270697

/...

INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 1996/310, by which the Council agreed that the sectoral theme for the coordination segment of its substantive session of 1997 would be "Freshwater, including clean and safe water supply and sanitation", and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on system-wide coordination in that area for its consideration. The report is divided into three parts: section I identifies emerging issues in water resources management, including in the area of water supply and sanitation; section II provides a broad assessment of activities of the United Nations system in addressing major water issues; and section III contains proposals for strengthening coordination in the future. A more detailed description of activities of organizations of the United Nations system in the field of water resources and in the area of water supply and sanitation will be before the Council in a background document.

I. EMERGING ISSUES IN WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

2. Concern over freshwater problems has been on the global agenda since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was convened at Stockholm in 1972. That concern was reinforced in subsequent United Nations conferences, notably the United Nations Water Conference, held at Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1977, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996. Following the United Nations Water Conference in 1977, the General Assembly sought to focus attention on the importance of universal coverage of safe water and adequate sanitation by proclaiming the period 1981-1990 as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

3. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its second session, in 1994, expressed great concern over current patterns of development, utilization and management of water resources, and requested a comprehensive assessment of the world's freshwater resources. The resulting comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world (see E/CN.17/1997/9), which was considered by the Commission at its fifth session, shows that current patterns of water use in developing countries, countries with economies in transition and industrialized countries alike are often not sustainable. There is mounting evidence that the world faces a worsening series of local and regional water quantity and quality problems, largely as a result of poor resource management, including ill-adapted allocative mechanisms, wasteful use of the resource, unregulated effluent disposal and weak institutional frameworks. The assessment also emphasizes the close interaction between land and water issues, including issues related to biodiversity, desertification and the protection of the marine environment.

4. The management of water resources for an efficient and equitable water allocation among competing uses has become an issue of paramount importance. Some estimates point to the possibility that by 2025, virtually all the economically accessible water in the world might be required in order to meet the needs of agriculture, industry, households and to maintain adequate lake

levels and river flows. The increasing degradation of water quality is rapidly becoming a cause of major concern. Water pollution will continue to increase unless more effort is put into prevention, including increased sewage and effluent treatment, and cleaner methods of industrial and agricultural production. There is also increasing concern about the entry of fertilizers and pesticides into surface water and groundwater, including persistent organic pollutants (POPs), such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and insecticides such as dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT). The comprehensive assessment also demonstrates that the capability to provide accurate water quantity and quality data is seriously lacking in many countries, and that in organizations within and outside the United Nations system, international efforts concerning information management remain fragmented and incomplete. The assessment recommended the establishment, especially within existing institutions of the United Nations system, of a global information network, with particular emphasis on water quantity, quality and use.

5. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in providing water supply and sanitation for all during the first half of the 1990s (A/50/213-E/1995/87), in spite of a significant expansion in the provision of drinking water and sanitation during the first half of the 1990s - during which an additional 800 million people were provided with clean water - over 1 billion people were estimated to be without access to safe water in 1994, and almost 3 billion were without adequate sanitation in developing countries. The challenge of providing full water supply and sanitation coverage to the urban areas of developing countries will be particularly daunting. In fact, the number of urban dwellers without access to adequate sanitation is expected to almost double during the current decade.[1] Special attention must be directed to rapid urbanization and the need to improve the incomes of the urban, peri-urban and rural poor, as well as to provide improved water supply and sanitation services.

6. It is widely recognized that the sustainable improvement of water supply and sanitation coverage is not only interdependent with the amelioration of other major water resources problems but also requires the implementation of broader socio-economic policies. As stated at the Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation (Noordwijk, the Netherlands, 22 and 23 March 1994), given the increasing scarcity of water resources relative to its demand for various uses, it is essential to deal with drinking water supply and sanitation within the context of a holistic management of freshwater (see E/CN.17/1994/12, annex), taking into account the links between water, sanitation, human health and environmental protection, and guided by the broader consideration of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of human settlements at large.

7. Increasing efforts are needed to promote partnerships between the public and private sectors and between institutions at the national and local levels so as to improve the allocative efficiency of investments in water and sanitation and to increase operational efficiency. Such efforts need to be coupled with effective government regulation and policies to ensure community participation and the involvement of women in the decision-making process. The scope for positive impact through hygiene education and behavioural change is particularly strong in both poor urban areas and rural areas.

II. REVIEW OF RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

8. The Mar del Plata Action Plan of the United Nations Water Conference, together with chapter 18 and other elements of Agenda 21, provide the basic framework for the programmes and activities of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. That framework is supplemented by relevant recommendations stemming from other conferences, such as the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994; the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in June 1996; and the World Food Summit held in Rome in November 1996.

A. Intergovernmental policy discussions on water-related programmes and activities of the United Nations system

9. The main intergovernmental bodies providing policy and guidance in the field of water resources are the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and two of its subsidiary bodies - the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Committee on Natural Resources - as well as the regional commissions.

10. The Commission on Sustainable Development provides a forum for high-level discussions on issues related to sustainable development, including water resources in the context of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. Following a review of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world at its fifth session, the Commission recommended that the General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session to be held in New York in June 1997, call for the highest priority to be given to the serious freshwater problems facing many regions, especially in the developing world, and that it call for a dialogue under the aegis of the Commission, beginning at its sixth session, to build a consensus on the necessary actions, in particular on the means of implementation and tangible results in order to consider initiating a strategic approach for the implementation of all aspects of the sustainable use of freshwater for social and economic purposes, including safe drinking water and sanitation, water for irrigation, recycling, wastewater management and the important role that water plays in natural ecosystems. The Commission also wished to emphasize that such an intergovernmental process would only be fully fruitful if there were a proven commitment by the international community to provide new and additional financial resources for the goals of such an initiative.

11. The Committee on Natural Resources has conducted periodic reviews of problems and issues in the field of water resources development and management in the context of the Mar del Plata Action Plan, and more recently in the context of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. As part of its agenda, the Committee reviews activities of the organizations of the system in the field of water resources with a view to promoting coordination and cooperation. At its fifth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development recommended that the work of the Committee be more compatible and supportive of the work programme of the Commission, and that the Economic and Social Council, in carrying out its functions related to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227,

consider, at its 1997 substantive session, the most effective means to implement that recommendation.

12. Policy discussions concerning water resources also take place in the regional commissions, all of which have specific branches and/or committees dealing with water resources. For example, a committee on water resources for the western Asian region has recently been established in response to resolution 295 (XVIII) of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, which was adopted on 25 May 1995. Similarly, water resources matters are discussed in the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Committee on Environmental Policy of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) also deals with water issues.

13. Other intergovernmental bodies in which general discussions on water resources take place include the governing bodies of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). World Bank activities are based on objectives approved by the Bank's Board of Executive Directors, in line with the Bank's recently defined Water Resources Policy.[2] The Global Environment Facility approach to international waters is part of its operational strategy. Every four to six years, UNESCO and WMO convene a joint international conference on hydrology with a view to reviewing the programme of work of both organizations.

B. Cooperative arrangements among organizations of the United Nations system

14. The impending merger of the three United Nations departments in the economic and social fields provides a good opportunity to bring together the analytical, normative and technical capacities of the United Nations Secretariat. The resulting synergies will enrich both the policy and the technical cooperation dimensions of United Nations activities in the economic and social fields.

1. The Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

15. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources is composed of all organizations and bodies of the United Nations system involved in the field of freshwater resources.[3] The United Nations Secretariat also serves as the secretariat for the Subcommittee and provides substantive servicing of its annual sessions. The Subcommittee reports to ACC through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD). The main functions of the Subcommittee, as approved by the fourth meeting of IACSD (Geneva, 14-16 June 1994), are to: (a) monitor and review progress in the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan and chapter 18 of Agenda 21;

(b) prepare proposals for submission to IACSD and other relevant bodies to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation and coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system in the field of water resources; (c) assist in the preparation of reports on issues related to water resources for submission to the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Committee on Natural Resources, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system active in the field; (d) analyse issues confronting the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the implementation of the water-related provisions of Agenda 21 and other relevant mandates from intergovernmental bodies with a view to formulating guidelines for concerted action; (e) formulate common strategies and joint programmes and activities among the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, including the consideration of issues related to capacity-building, institutional and human resources development and the role of women in the management of water resources for sustainable development; (f) provide a forum for the exchange of information on the work programmes of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the field of water resources; (g) enhance the coordination of country-level activities by the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system concerning the application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources; (h) provide a mechanism for a dialogue with international, regional and bilateral organizations, as well as with non-governmental scientific and professional organizations active in the field of water resources; and (i) raise public awareness of the importance of water resources and their appropriate uses.

16. The Subcommittee is the task manager for monitoring and reviewing of progress in implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. With regard to the modalities for the preparation of the reviews of chapter 18, the ACC Subcommittee at its fourteenth session agreed that the United Nations Secretariat would act as focal point for the area of integrated water resources development and management; UNESCO and WMO for water resources assessment; WHO for protection of water resources, water quality and aquatic ecosystems, and for drinking-water supply and sanitation; the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for water and sustainable urban development; FAO for water for sustainable food production and rural development; and WMO for the impact of climate change on water resources. With regard to cross-cutting issues, it was agreed that the International Research and Training Centre for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), UNICEF and UNESCO would act as focal points for issues concerning women's communication, education and research, respectively. The Secretariat of the Subcommittee, provided by the United Nations, is responsible for consolidation of inputs provided by other organizations and for the preparation of final reports of the Secretary-General. Other major recent outputs of the Subcommittee include the publication of various regional water resources assessments in 1991, in connection with the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan, the organization of the International Conference on Water and the Environment in 1992[4] and the above-mentioned Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World.

17. The Subcommittee also provides an overall mechanism for the formulation and/or review of the initiatives described below.

2. Inter-agency Steering Committee for Water Supply and Sanitation

18. Following the launching in 1980 of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the Steering Committee for Cooperative Action for the Decade was established for the purpose of enhancing cooperation among the organizations of the system in the field of drinking water supply and sanitation. At the end of the Decade, coordination continued through the evolution of that Committee into the Steering Committee for Water Supply and Sanitation with a view to continuing the momentum gathered during the Decade. In view of the inextricable relationship between issues related to drinking water supply and sanitation and other competing uses in the context of a holistic approach to water resources development and management, the Steering Committee for Water Supply and Sanitation has become a working group of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources. The meetings of the Steering Committee are held in conjunction with those of the Subcommittee, to which its main conclusions are reported. Major tasks of the Steering Committee are the monitoring of needs and progress towards achieving universal coverage and fostering a common approach among organizations of the system. The Steering Committee recently finalized a consensus document setting out key issues to be addressed and actions to be taken by the organizations of the system. In addition, UNICEF and WHO are reinforcing their collaboration and the coordination of their water supply and sanitation activities through a joint strategy that was approved at the meeting of the Joint Committee on Health Promotion in May 1997.

3. Other cooperative arrangements

(a) Water resources assessment

19. Recent studies carried out by various United Nations organizations all indicate that national hydrological services and agencies, particularly but not only in developing countries, have become less capable of assessing their respective water resources. Many national agencies have faced reductions in observing networks and staffing deficiencies at a time when water demand is rising rapidly in many countries, and when the need for sustainable water resources is becoming increasingly urgent. Within the United Nations system, WMO and UNESCO have taken the lead in efforts to ameliorate the problem, with the coordination of their activities being based on an inter-agency working agreement established in the 1970s. Steps are now being taken to remedy the reduction in observing networks and staffing deficiencies. One example is the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System, set up by WMO, whose overall objective is to contribute to the improvement of national and regional water resources assessment capabilities. That initiative is already under way in Mediterranean countries and southern Africa, with the support of the European Union and the World Bank, and plans are well advanced in other regions. Related activities include the African Water Resources Assessment Strategy adopted by the African Conference on Water Resources, convened jointly by WMO and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) at Addis Ababa in March 1995, and the Action Plan adopted by the Conference on Water Resources Assessment and Management Strategies in Latin America and the Caribbean, convened jointly by WMO and the Interamerican Development Bank at San José, Costa Rica, in May 1996.

(b) Protection of water quality

20. UNEP, in cooperation with WHO, WMO, UNESCO, ECE and a number of institutions outside the United Nations system, provides a framework for the Global Freshwater Quality Monitoring Programme (GEMS/Water), within which global monitoring programmes are operated and assessments undertaken. Linkage with health protection objectives is also maintained by WHO through GEMS/Water and through its work on water pollution control. FAO is linking up through its recently established interdepartmental working group on pollution of natural resources in the context of non-point sources of pollution from agricultural activities. The disease control and eradication programmes of WHO, notably its programmes for diarrhoeal diseases, guinea worm, schistosomiasis and river blindness, as well as the Joint WHO/FAO/UNEP/Habitat Panel of Experts on Environmental Management for Vector Control, have had a significant impact on the way in which water resources are being managed in many countries. Hydrological questions in that area are also being dealt with by the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) of UNESCO and the Hydrology and Water Resources Programme of WMO.

21. Despite the efforts noted above, the lack of water quality data at both the national and international levels remains a serious problem. With a view to improving the situation, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, at its seventeenth session, supported a proposal for the development of a comprehensive water quality programme, as a cooperative effort of UNESCO, UNEP, the United Nations University, the United Nations Secretariat and WHO, based on a carefully selected global network of representative drainage basins encompassing a broad spectrum of environments so that future extrapolation to unmonitored basins can be achieved. Each monitored basin is to support a carefully planned integrated research and training programme to develop appropriate water quality models for addressing the needs of water supply, water and health, and the broader objective of improving the condition of the environment. At the same session, the Subcommittee also recommended that the GEMS/Water programme be strengthened as a means of rectifying the present lack of information on water quality within the framework of water resources assessment.

(c) Integrated water resources management

22. Several organizations of the United Nations system, through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, have been engaged in the process of formulating strategies for accelerating progress in the area of integrated water resources development and management, with the United Nations Secretariat, the World Bank, UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as lead agencies. In 1994, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources requested UNDP, FAO and the World Bank to prepare a joint guide on water resources policy review and reform and on strategy formulation. The agencies subsequently merged their respective publications[5] and FAO organized an expert consultation in January 1995 to review their joint document. The expert consultation included representatives not only of the three agencies but also of several organizations of the United Nations system and several selected countries. The main outcome of this joint initiative, Water Sector Policy Review and Strategy Formulation: A General Framework, was published in 1995.[6] The Framework makes the case for a

systematic water policy review in two stages: review and adaption of water policy and formulation of strategies.

23. Several examples of coordinated efforts for river basin management at the international level, such as those in the Lower Mekong, Lake Chad and Danube basins, were identified and discussed at a major United Nations interregional meeting on river and lake basin development jointly organized by ECA, the former Department for Technical Cooperation and Development of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, held at Addis Ababa in the late 1980s. That meeting also paved the way for the development of an iterative approach to policy formulation and resource planning by various organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Secretariat, the World Bank, UNEP, WMO and the regional commissions, with particular attention being given to the failures as well as the successes of various river basin programmes throughout the world. That innovative approach is currently being tested through several joint technical cooperation activities by organizations of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Secretariat, UNDP and UNEP, in many developing countries and river basins.

(d) Sustainable urban water management

24. As a response to the rapid pace of urbanization in developing countries and the escalating demands for the improved management of water resources, water supply, sanitation and drainage in urban areas, most organizations of the United Nations system are giving increasing attention to the execution of activities related to water and sustainable urban development. Some examples of that trend include the UNESCO/WMO initiatives on urban hydrology; the urban water supply and sanitation components of the UNDP/World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme; the growing activities of UNICEF in peri-urban areas; the inclusion of a special subprogramme to attend urban problems in the new WHO Enhanced Programme for the Promotion of Environmental Health; and the activities on water resources and urban infrastructure management being implemented by Habitat, notably through its Sustainable Cities and Urban Management Programmes.

25. The Habitat II preparatory process included an international conference on the theme "Managing water resources for large cities and towns", organized by Habitat in cooperation with UNEP, the United Nations Secretariat and other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. The conference, held at Beijing from 18 to 21 March 1996, was attended by more than 150 participants from 50 countries, bilateral agencies, United Nations agencies, sector professionals and leading non-governmental organizations. The "Beijing Declaration" reiterated the Dublin Principles adopted at the above-mentioned International Conference on Water and the Environment and focused on the urgency of undertaking greater efforts to promote management to improve the efficiency of water use, as well as the importance of innovative financing mechanisms and broad-based partnerships bringing together the public and private sectors and local communities.

(e) Sustainable agriculture and rural water management

26. A technical consultation on this subject was convened by FAO in 1993, in close collaboration with UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank and WHO, which produced

broad guidelines for programme implementation and a number of specific recommendations for action. The consultation underscored the importance of national water sector assessments, which have already been initiated under the programme area of integrated water resources management as a starting point for the identification of capacity-building needs and priorities. The second technical consultation on integrated rural water management, which took place at Geneva in June 1995, was jointly organized by FAO, UNICEF, WHO, UNDP and the World Bank.[7] The third technical consultation, on the theme "Building the bridge between water supply, sanitation and irrigation", scheduled to take place in New York in July 1997, will be jointly organized by UNICEF, FAO, WHO, UNDP, the World Bank and the United Nations Secretariat.

27. In addition, the International Action Programme on Water and Sustainable Agricultural Development, established by FAO, is being used as the major instrument for assisting United Nations Member States in implementing the sustainable agriculture programme area of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. The Programme focuses on the following areas: (a) review of the national water sector in general and the irrigation subsector in particular; (b) identification of issues and opportunities for development in the context of policies/ strategies, river basin master planning, adaptation of technologies, management issues, environmental sustainability, and national capacity-building; and (c) formulation of national action programmes to address issues and realize opportunities. Assistance has been provided to formulate national and subregional action programmes in China, Egypt, Indonesia, Syria, the United Republic of Tanzania, Turkey, Zimbabwe and the Lake Chad basin. Assistance for initial implementation of the programme has been provided to four of those countries: Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

(f) Water resources management in Africa

28. The Steering Committee for the implementation of the Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa has established, inter alia, the Inter-agency Working Group on Water, chaired by UNEP, in order to coordinate the Initiative's water components. At the last meeting of the Inter-agency Working Group, which took place in October 1996 in conjunction with the seventeenth session of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, members of the Working Group reviewed ongoing and planned activities in support of the implementation of the water-related objectives of the Special Initiative and the role of lead agencies concerning specific objectives. The Working Group also discussed criteria for the identification of both areas or countries on which concerted action by the organizations of the system should focus and indicators of success in the implementation of such activities. The Working Group has identified four priority objectives: (a) assuring sustainable and equitable freshwater; (b) household water security; (c) freshwater assessments; and (d) water for food security. The Working Group has also identified Mali, Ethiopia, Uganda and Mozambique as focus countries in which concerted United Nations system efforts to implement the water objectives of the Special Initiative will shortly commence.

29. Another example of recent inter-agency cooperation in Africa is the Africa 2000 Initiative on water supply and sanitation, which was launched by the ministers of health of 46 African countries at the meeting of the WHO Regional

Committee for Africa in September 1994. The first regional consultation on the Africa 2000 Initiative was held at Brazzaville, the Congo, in June 1996. It brought together some 140 participants, including senior government officials from almost all the countries of Africa and representatives of United Nations organizations, development agencies and non-governmental organizations. The Brazzaville Declaration adopted at the consultation stressed the needs for priorities to be based on people's choices, for development to be founded on local skills and resources aimed at producing appropriate solutions, for partnerships to be formed among communities, local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and development agencies, and for external support to be based on national plans and programmes. The consultation also called for the appointment of Africa 2000 focal points in all countries, the linking of Africa 2000 with other development initiatives on the continent, especially the Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa. In addition, two meetings held between UNICEF and the World Bank - in Benin in October 1995 and in Kenya in November 1996 - recorded the commitment of both agencies, including the UNDP/World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme, to collaborate in supporting sub-Saharan countries in their efforts to promote access to water by the poor, as well as sanitation and hygiene education in both rural and urban areas.

(g) Global Programme of Action for Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

30. There is an overriding need to consider the hydrological linkage among land, rivers, coastal areas and oceans. In highlighting the role of UNEP as the secretariat of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities - in cooperation with other United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations - the Governing Council of UNEP, in its decision 19/14, invited the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas, in collaboration with the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, to perform the functions of a steering committee on technical cooperation and assistance for the Programme of Action, including activities related to a clearing house, with representation from regional and international organizations that have primary roles and responsibilities for its implementation. Initial informal contacts between the two Subcommittees were established by the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas at its last session in January 1997, through the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and its secretariat. Further informal consultations are currently being arranged by the United Nations Secretariat, as secretariat of the ACC Subcommittee on Water, together with the secretariat of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas. Arrangements for formal consultations, as needed, still need to be worked out.

(h) Capacity-building

31. The central importance of capacity-building for sustainable water resources management was best expressed during the UNDP symposium on the theme "A strategy for water resources capacity-building", held at Delft, the Netherlands, in June 1991.[8] In cooperation with other organizations of the United Nations system, UNDP organized a second symposium on water sector capacity-building, which was held at Delft from 3 to 6 December 1996. INSTRAW, in cooperation with

the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin and the United Nations Secretariat, has developed a series of multimedia training packages on women and water supply and sanitation. Regional seminars for testing the modules have also been held in Africa and Asia. In addition, the Global Capacity-Building Programme for Sustainable Water Sector Development - which is funded by UNDP, the Netherlands and several other donors - has supported water sector assessments and strategy formulation in nine countries (Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Mali, Ghana, Sudan, Swaziland, the Guizhou Province of China and Viet Nam). The Programme is based upon consultation with main stakeholders, and is designed to produce the following outputs: (a) a process of capacity-building initiated by a water sector assessment; (b) a nucleus of officials and specialists trained in sustainable water sector development; (c) water sector assessment reports, including planning frameworks; (d) improved cross-sectoral collaboration; and (e) improved coordination among national agencies and external support agencies.

(i) Preparations for the dissemination of the World Day for Water

32. In order to provide the necessary support to the yearly observance of the World Day for Water (22 March), the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources has agreed to assign one or several of its member organizations as lead agencies for a given year, in accordance with the theme for that year. Observance of the World Day for Water has been characterized by increasing system-wide cooperation. The 1996 theme, "Water for thirsty cities" was selected by the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources to coincide with the convening of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II); Habitat was designated as the lead agency for the organization of events for the Day. Several activities were organized for the observance of the Day, in collaboration with the United Nations Secretariat, UNEP, UNDP, WMO, the World Bank, the regional commissions, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, and numerous non-governmental organizations including the above-mentioned international conference on managing water resources for large cities and towns. The theme for the observance of the World Day for Water in 1997, "Water resources assessment", was selected to be linked with the publication of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world. UNESCO and WMO were designated as the lead agencies for the organization of activities for the Day, which included a prominent link-up with the First World Water Forum, held at Marrakesh, Morocco, in March 1997, whose central theme was "Water resources management in the next century". The Forum was an important meeting of high-level officials and experts in the field of water resources, which was jointly organized by the Government of Morocco and the recently established World Water Council (see para. 39 below).

33. The theme of the World Day for Water in 1998 will be "Groundwater, invisible resource" in order to stress the importance of the sustainable development and management of groundwater resources. The United Nations Secretariat and UNICEF were selected as lead agencies to organize the observance of the Day on that theme.

4. Coordination at the regional level

34. Coordination of activities of organizations of the United Nations system at the regional level is carried out through inter-agency committees in both ECA and ESCAP.

5. Coordination at the national level

35. Because of the multifaceted nature of the work of the organizations of the United Nations system, there is inevitably overlapping of their activities at the national level, because each organization brings a different perspective to its work at the country level. That overlap, however, does not necessarily undermine the overall effectiveness of the system provided that activities are coordinated around a concerted approach to the issue. The country strategy notes, where they exist, can be useful tools to bring together, in a coordinated manner, the concerns of the programme country and the United Nations efforts in the area, and the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources provides a forum through which such harmonization can be promoted. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed to delineate more clearly the areas of comparative advantage of each organization in the field, and thus to strengthen their collective activities at the national level. With the exception of instances where one organization provides direct support to another in the implementation of a given project or programme, activities and projects of various organizations are too often carried out without sufficient knowledge or consideration of those undertaken by others.

36. The lack of comprehensive information concerning activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, particularly at the country level, has hampered closer cooperation among organizations and increased efforts to overcome that problem are needed. The Subcommittee has agreed on the need to establish a distributed database system linked to an Internet home page on United Nations water activities. The Subcommittee has decided that the database should initially be based on the United Nations field-level activities and later be developed to include information on global, regional and local activities. A task force comprising representatives of UNDP, the World Bank, the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNEP and ECA was formed in order to make recommendations on the scope and content of the database and on an implementation schedule. As a first step, the database is to be established for sub-Saharan countries that are part of the Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa; later it will be expanded to become a global database. The Subcommittee needs to devote urgent attention to that endeavour, taking advantage of the latest means for electronic communication.

C. Cooperative arrangements among organizations within and outside of the United Nations system

1. The Global Water Partnership

37. The Global Water Partnership was officially launched at Stockholm in August 1996. The Partnership is an international mechanism aiming to translate the

consensus on water management into responsive, coherent services to developing countries, with an emphasis on local implementation. It will support integrated water resources management programmes by collaborating with Governments and existing networks, and will also develop new arrangements and encourage Governments, aid agencies and other stakeholders to adopt consistent and mutually complementary policies and programmes and share their information and experience. In addition, it will develop solutions to common problems within integrated water resources management, suggest policies and practices based on those solutions, and help match needs to available resources. The Partnership is co-sponsored by UNDP, the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, at its seventeenth session, in October 1996, agreed that the Chief of the FAO Water Resources Development and Management Service or the Chairman of the Subcommittee would represent it at the meetings of the Interim Committee of the Partnership in order to strengthen cooperation with the Partnership.

2. The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council

38. The main goal of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council is to enhance collaboration among developing countries and external support agencies so as to accelerate the achievement of sustainable water supply, sanitation and waste management for all people, with an emphasis on the poor. Members of organizations and bodies of the United Nations system dealing with water supply and sanitation are also members of the Collaborative Council, and a linkage with the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources is ensured through the work of the Inter-agency Steering Committee on Water Supply and Sanitation.

3. The World Water Council

39. The World Water Council is currently in the process of being established. Its first major international initiative was to co-organize the above-mentioned First World Water Forum. Its membership is open to national and international institutions, government agencies, private and public organizations and firms, non-governmental organizations, and academic and scientific organizations. A link with the members of the ACC Subcommittee is currently being ensured through the Subcommittee's Chairman and Secretary.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN COORDINATION

40. The monitoring of progress in the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21 has yielded further understanding of the need to take a more comprehensive approach to water resources. The process of coordination and cooperation is currently characterized by an increasing appreciation of the importance of taking a holistic and comprehensive approach to land and water resources development, so that no one programme area can proceed without referring to the requirements of others or to overall economic and social priorities. There is a clear understanding of the need to formulate concerted approaches to integrated water resources development and management, which in turn should provide an

overall umbrella for coordination and cooperation at both the national and international levels.

41. The organizations and bodies of the United Nations system have made significant strides since the late 1980s in developing a common understanding of issues and approaches towards solving them, particularly with regard to integrated development and management; cooperation in the preparation and servicing of the 1992 International Conference on Water and the Environment was a good example of that progress. In spite of their different mandates and responsibilities, as well as a general paucity of human and financial resources, United Nations entities have demonstrated a considerable capacity for cooperative joint ventures on concrete and well-defined subjects. Nevertheless, there remain numerous opportunities for improvements. Given the complexity of water resources issues and the nature of the mandates of the different organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, a certain amount of overlap and even duplication is, at times, inevitable, particularly in activities at the country level. At a time of stringent budgetary constraints, further efforts are needed in order to streamline programmes and activities along the lines of each organization's comparative advantage and in keeping with their respective mandates. The ACC Subcommittee needs to redouble its efforts in that regard, taking into account the terms of reference given to it by IACSD. In addition, organizations active at the national level need to improve coordination of their field activities and to support efforts made by the office of the United Nations resident coordinator to that end.

42. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its fifth session, in April 1997, called for the highest priority to be given to the serious freshwater problems facing many regions, especially the developing world. Given the seriousness of the situation, that is likely to be best achieved if all actors involved, including Governments, international organizations, scientific and research institutes and non-governmental organizations, cooperate and contribute to the goal of more efficient water resources management. The United Nations system can clearly continue to play a significant role in providing technical and financial support to national efforts to develop (a) sustainable water strategies that address basic human needs, as well as the preservation of ecosystems, in ways that are consistent with national socio-economic objectives; and (b) national water policies and plans that promote cost-efficient water technologies, economic pricing and efficient water use. In addition, the United Nations system should intensify assistance to national efforts to build up needed expertise on water issues among water users and decision makers at all levels, thus increasing their capacity to deal with complex water management questions.

43. Given the problems related to lack of data identified during the preparation of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, there is an urgent need for national and international agreements to harmonize the information systems that provide the data needed for decision-making. In that regard, the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its fifth session, called for a strengthening of the capability of Governments and international institutions to collect and manage information, including scientific, social and environmental data, in order to facilitate the integrated assessment and management of water resources. The situation is particularly

critical with regard to water quality data. The ACC Subcommittee, therefore, needs to take the lead in strengthening the capability of the international community in assisting developing countries, at their request, to enhance their information management capabilities, and to take measures towards the creation of a global information network encompassing organizations within and outside the United Nations system.

44. The comprehensive assessment, as well as numerous other studies, have emphasized the close relationship between the management and use of water resources, land management, the preservation of aquatic ecosystems and climate change. Close links need to be established between the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources as a whole and individual organizations, with the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification Particularly in Africa, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. As previously indicated, given the strong relationship between freshwater resources and the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities, a strong working relationship will need to be developed with the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas in connection with the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution. Similarly, closer attention needs to be given to the link with work concerning toxic chemicals, particularly POPs and waste management in view of their impact on water quality.

45. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its fifth session, also called for a strengthening of regional and international cooperation for technological transfer and the financing of integrated water resources programmes and projects, in particular those designed to increase access to safe water supply and sanitation. The flow of financial resources for water resources development and for operation and maintenance of projects remains far short of requirements. Increased efforts, as well as new and innovative approaches to the generation of financial resources, are needed at both the national and international levels. With regard to the generation of financial resources at the national level, the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, together with Governments, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector, need to engage in a continuing dialogue concerning the formulation of pricing and subsidy policies that favour the generation of financing while providing for the equitable distribution of resources and the satisfaction of basic human needs. More attention needs to be given to ways of enhancing the role of the private sector as a partner in the provision of services, particularly with regard to water supply and sanitation. New forms of partnership, such as the Global Water Partnership, need to be developed at the international level in order to enhance the level of and efficacy of financial and technical support to developing countries.

46. Although issues concerning the transfer and adaptation of technologies have been dealt with by individual organizations in their respective areas of concern, the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system have not yet developed a coherent approach to the question. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, at its fifteenth session, in 1995, agreed upon the need to focus on that issue; however, although some incipient work is being carried out under the leadership of UNDP, the pace of efforts needs to be strengthened in order to

increase the effectiveness of the system in tnat regard. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to note that the UNEP Freshwater Unit, in cooperation with its International Environment Centre in Japan, has just completed a comprehensive regional assessment and a series of workshops on appropriate technologies for freshwater augmentation.

47. Because of the role of the regional commissions with regard to assistance in the implementation of Agenda 21 within their respective regions, they can be instrumental in coordinating system-wide activities at the regional level. In the recent past, the commissions have not been able to participate in a consistent manner in the work of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, owing mostly to budgetary constraints. The failure to appreciate the long-term value of coordination of programmes and activities leads to insularity among organizations, and tends to undermine the overall capacity of the United Nations system to respond to major water problems. In that regard, the various coordination efforts being carried out throughout the system, particularly through the Subcommittee, need to benefit from the regular participation of the regional commissions.

48. The successful outcome of the dialogue called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, for consideration at the special session of the General Assembly, will require the fullest support of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, in partnership with non-governmental organizations and major groups, in particular the private sector. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and each of the organizations concerned will need to devote their energies in the forthcoming year to elucidating major issues, particularly those enumerated above, as well as to providing policy approaches for the consideration of the intergovernmental process. That question will be on the agenda at the eighteenth session of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources in September 1997. In addition, however, informal consultations among its members will be essential prior to and following that session. The ACC Subcommittee will need to bring other interested organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector into the process in order to provide the Commission on Sustainable Development with the best possible framework for its discussions. In that regard, it should be noted that a one-day session with non-governmental organizations has been envisaged prior to the eighteenth session of the ACC Subcommittee. Such institutions as the Global Water Partnership, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and the World Water Council, as well as representatives of the private sector, will need to work hand-in-hand with the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system.

49. As in the case of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, it is envisaged that the inter-agency work in support of the dialogue to be conducted under the aegis of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be carried out through a steering committee composed of members of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, as well as representatives of other key organizations and bodies of the United Nations system.

Notes

[1] See World Economic and Social Survey, 1996 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.II.C.1).

[2] See World Bank, Water Resources Management (Washington, D.C., 1993).

[3] The following organizations and bodies of the United Nations system are currently members of the Subcommittee: FAO; IAEA; the World Bank; INSTRAW; Habitat; UNICEF; the Department for Development Support and Management Services, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat; UNDP; ECA; ESCAP; ECE; ECLAC; ESCWA; UNESCO; UNEP; UNHCR; UNIDO; UNU; WHO; and WMO.

[4] See World Meteorological Organization, International Conference on Water and the Environment: Development Issues for the Twenty-first Century (Geneva, 1992).

[5] The World Bank policy paper entitled "Water resources management", published in 1993, provides a conceptual framework and stresses the importance of a holistic approach to water resources management; specific guidelines for the formulation of water resources strategies were also proposed in a joint UNDP-World Bank technical paper entitled "A guide to the formulation of water resources strategy", published in 1994, and in Reforming Water Resources Policy: A Guide to Methods, Processes and Practices (FAO, 1995).

[6] Rome, FAO, 1995.

[7] See WHO, Integrated Rural Water Management (Geneva, 1995).

[8] See IHE/UNDP, A Strategy for Water Sector Capacity-Building (New York, 1991).